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BY
SAM MIMS

Claiborne Parish, a very small segment of Rural America, is situated in the hills of north Louisiana, a half-hundred miles from the fertile delta lands of Red River on the West and Ouachita River on the east. Its population is 25,066, 52% of whom are Negroes, and this ratio prevails in Homer, the seat of parish government. Homer, Haynesville and Athens are the only towns and have a combined population of about 8,000. The other inhabitants, Negroes and whites, live on farms and in the dozen villages and hamlets scattered over Claiborne's 766 square miles of area.

The person who doesn't know why geographical subdivisions in Louisiana are called **parishes** instead of **counties** is ignorant of some very interesting American history, and that lack of knowledge deprives him of a beautiful example of religious tolerance.

After the Louisiana Purchase, Cole Claiborne became the first Protestant to preside as governor in the Province of Louisiana. He and his legislative body divided the Territory of Orleans into counties whose boundaries conformed roughly to those ecclesiastic parishes that had been established, long ago, by the Catholic Church. But the people of the Territory, Catholics and Protestants alike, couldn't force themselves to say "county." No one approved of saying "County of Saint Mary," or "County of Saint Jean de Baptiste." Sounds blasphemous, thought the Protestants, and the Catholics were grateful.

At the next session of the legislature Gov-

ernor Claiborne and the law-makers said in effect, "Let's subscribe to the wishes of the people — let's call our territorial subdivisions **parishes** and thereby honor the church that first established them."

So, we look to Louisiana for an example of wholesome religious tolerance. We may also look to Claiborne Parish, named in honor of the first Protestant governor, for examples of racial tolerance.

Claiborne is not among Louisiana's opulent parishes. Industrialists have not, in great numbers, established themselves in her rolling hills. Years ago hidden reservoirs of oil and gas were tapped and for a short while she had two "boom" towns. Subsequently, the deep gas-condensate resources made her oil and gas industry more substantial, with reserves indicating a continuance of the business for 20 to 30 years.

In 1958, the population of Claiborne Parish consists almost entirely of families who were here before the "oil boom." Despite economic and other conditions which usually tempt people to roam, Negroes and whites remain because they like to live here. Those "old-timers" would plead guilty to the charge that they are worshipers of tradition, and as proof of their guilt would point, with pride, to their century-old courthouse.

People of both races are proud of their record of "give and take," meaning their fair treatment of each other and of their friendly relationship.

During the six years in which the present District Attorney served Claiborne Parish there have been only two interracial homicides, a white man killed a Negro and a Negro killed a white man. Neither of these crimes was the result of racial conflict or animosity; both were caused by individual quarrels.

A search of courthouse and newspaper records covering the past 25 years failed to reveal any mention of a lynching, so a dozen elderly whites and Negroes, all born and reared in Claiborne, were questioned. None of them could recall a lynching that had taken place during his or her lifetime.

The office of the Louisiana Association of Citizens' Councils is located in Homer and its President, State Senator W. M. Rainach, operates a business there and lives on a farm nearby. His colored employees are very fond of "Mister Willie," and evidence that fact by faithful service. His leadership in the fight the Association of Citizens' Councils is making for continued separation of the races has had no effect whatsoever upon Senator Rainach's business, insofar as Negro trade is concerned. He has lost no Negro customers because of it, and has gained the normal number of new ones since he helped organize the Council movement two years ago.

Records in the office of the Secretary of State reveal that there are no members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People registered from Claiborne Parish. If there is a member of that organization residing here, he has not complied with the law which demands a public recording of membership with the Secretary of State, such as is required of all organizations, including the State

Association of Citizens' Councils and its 65 local units.

Obviously the NAACP membership list filed by some parish branches was "padded" in several instances. On February 19, 1958, eight Negro citizens of DeSoto Parish journeyed to Baton Rouge and to the State Capitol, went to the office of the Secretary of State and demanded that their names be removed from the list filed, declaring they were not and never had been members of the NAACP.

If Negroes of Claiborne Parish needed or wanted aid from the NAACP they would certainly make some attempt to maintain a unit affiliate near the camp of that organization's most active enemy — the Association of Citizens' Councils.

Even since the U. S. Supreme Court's decision in 1954 there has been only one incident in Claiborne Parish that remotely violated the "separate but equal" jurisprudence which was accepted as "the law of the land" for 58 years. That episode which occurred on Sunday, February 16, 1958, would be insignificant but for the fact that it is the only manifestation of disappointment or unrest over the laws and customs which still prevail in Claiborne Parish in spite of sociological interdictions.

A Negro woman walked into the vestibule of one of Homer's churches for whites and stood there, until a white man asked her what she wanted. She answered that she was there to attend church; that she was "touring the country" and had selected the particular church because it was the nicest looking one in town.

No threats were made against the intruder; no harsh words were spoken. "There are

churches for members of your race just a few blocks away," she was told. "I will show you how to get there. This church is reserved for white people, and you would not enjoy it here for you would be out of place."

Quietly, the usher directed the woman to a church for Negroes, and the episode ended there.

Had that traveler been looking for the finest school building in town, she would have stopped at the Homer Negro high school, a building that is modern in every respect. Had the visitor also gone to Haynesville and to Athens she would have learned that in those two Claiborne Parish towns the Negroes have the finest school buildings.

There is no incongruity in the fact that the Negroes of Claiborne Parish have the finest school buildings and yet the poorest churches. That is typical all over the State and perhaps throughout the South. There is nothing unusual about that discrepancy.

In Claiborne Parish, white taxpayers supply 95% of the money that goes into the building and operation of public schools, whereas Negroes are "on their own" when it comes to providing themselves with churches.

On October 8, 1957, J. R. Oakes, Chief Deputy Tax Collector for Claiborne Parish, released a statement showing the amount of State and Parish taxes to be collected for that year, from which this tabulation is quoted:

Taxes from whites	\$191,202.89
Taxes from Negroes	7,906.45
Taxes from Homer whites ..	52,689.68
Taxes from Homer Negroes	1,571.70

In this regard anti-Southerners charge that Negroes in the South have little opportunity to

own property, or to become affluent, or attain prominence in the professions, but such claims are refuted by the fact that some of them are highly successful. In Ward 7 (a parish subdivision), 29-3/5% of the land is owned by Negroes. However, individual ownership consists of small acreage, thereby making virtually all of it exempt from taxation, under what is known as "the homestead law."

The President of Grambling College and the President of Southern University, state-supported schools for Negroes, were born, reared and educated in Louisiana. Should either of them leave the South, it is doubtful that he could find a job that would pay him half the salary he is now getting. It is also doubtful that offers of an equal salary would induce either of them to leave his present situation. They, like many other outstanding Negroes of the South, are satisfied. Here, in the field of education, they have to compete only with members of their own race.

Records in the office of the Parish Superintendent of Education disclose that for the 1956-57 school year, 112 Negro teachers were employed in Claiborne Parish and their aggregate salaries amounted to \$496,381.00. Scholastic requirements are the same for teachers of both races and their rate of pay identical.

The Negroes of Claiborne Parish have in Homer, Haynesville and Athens as fine school buildings as can be found in any towns of comparable sizes in the United States; furthermore, they have, in an adjoining parish, twenty miles from Athens, a state-supported college that employs 144 teachers, all Negroes, of course.

Dr. Ralph Jones, typical of his race, brimful of delightful humor, is president of that college. He is often seen in Baton Rouge during

legislative sessions. Around the State Capitol one frequently hears such statements as, "That Negro is the best lobbyist in the State. He can get more out of the legislature than anybody else."

At the last session of the legislature, five million eighty-three thousand, seven hundred and eighty dollars were appropriated to that college, out of which one million, seven hundred thousand were "dedicated to the purchase of land and the construction and equipment of new buildings." This, however, was by no means the top biennial appropriation to that college. Although appropriations to all state-supported colleges are administered by the State School Board, Dr. Jones and his staff have grown accustomed to the task of planning and directing the usage of considerable sums of money.

Some of the legislators looked carefully at the bill that proposed an appropriation of one million seven hundred thousand dollars for new buildings on a campus where there isn't a structure that is over thirty years old. But when the bill came up for passage there wasn't a dissenting vote.

Back in 1928, when that school was created by act of the legislature, it was given an outlandish name. For several years friends of the college tried to get the cumbersome appellation changed and shortened. These attempts failed repeatedly.

The story is told that Ralph Jones then took over the job, giving it a new twist. Appearing before the State School Board with the view to getting its support when the matter came before the Legislature for a vote, Jones discussed the need for a better and shorter name for his college, then interrupted his argument by ask-

ing permission to make a demonstration of the case in point.

The privilege was granted.

Without another word Dr. Jones stepped to the door, motioned with his hand, and immediately a half-dozen smartly outfitted cheerleaders filed in. The six students of the school formed a circle, bent their heads together, and chanted in unison, "Rah, rah, rah for dear old **North Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial School,**" and immediately filed out again.

No cheers ever brought such rapid and complete victory. After the laughter subsided, only one question was asked: "Ralph, what do you want to name your school?"

"Grambling College," Dr. Jones replied. And it's been Grambling College since that legislative session.

Negroes of Claiborne Parish are no less indifferent toward integration than they are toward government aid for school construction. They don't need government interference or government aid any more than they need the NAACP. They are doubtful of an organization that claims its sole purpose is for the advancement of "colored people," primarily through integration of schools, when no member of their race has ever been its president; they are dubious when they learn that Claiborne Parish — small in area and limited in financial resources — actually pays out more money each year to Negro teachers than does any one of a dozen states in which integration has always prevailed.

"Government aid to schools? We've had a taste of government aid and we don't like it." That's the universal opinion of folks around Homer, Louisiana.

Negroes living in this small segment of Rural America are just as vehement in their criticism of a former government aid project as are their white friends. A dozen Negro landowners will tell you that they would be far better off today had the Resettlement Administration never operated in Claiborne Parish, depriving them, back in 1935, of 23,000 acres of land which "experts" pronounced submarginal. Older men and women of both races remember that government agents came into their community twenty-three years ago, talking glibly about a "higher standard of living," painting glowing word-pictures of a "resettlement area" (that never existed) where "resettlers" would have better homes, better roads, better schools and churches and richer soil to cultivate. They remember that the government acquired 23,000 acres of land at an average price of \$7.12 per acre, when there isn't an acre of it that won't produce, every year, a crop of timber that's worth that much money.

Many landowners in Claiborne Parish regret they weren't as prophetic as Hodge Dixon, a Negro landowner who said to a government agent "Before I jump off the limb I'm roosting on, I want to see the limb I'm supposed to land on."

Hodge is roosting securely on a high limb today because he refused to let a government agent push him off. He nor any one else has ever seen the limb he was "supposed to land on" for the reason that the government never resettled a single family or a sole person from whom they bought land at \$7.12 per acre.

The people of Claiborne Parish have several million dollars invested in school buildings. They see no justice in surrendering that investment to the federal government, which they be-

lieve would be the ultimate result of government aid to education. They are not forgetful of the old saying, "He who pays the fiddler calls the tunes." They firmly believe that government aid today means government control tomorrow.

In a private library in Claiborne Parish are copies of the Congressional Record for the year 1916, and to one issue is appended newspaper clippings concerning discussions in Congress over the Smith-Hughes bill that provided federal aid to local vocational education. Supporters of the bill assured doubtful ones that this would never lead to government control. A part of this interesting file is a copy of a directive, issued twenty years later:

"Each state is required to submit a plan which must meet with the approval of the Federal Office of Education."

Sputnik came as a godsend to NAACP and to the National Education Association and other groups who are determined to turn education over to the federal government. The appearance of Sputnik gave them excuse to launch a campaign of panic and hysteria designed to induce constituents to appeal to their congressmen for federal aid to education.

But the people of Claiborne Parish are neither alarmed nor impressed. If by concerted action they send a message to the Congress it will read: "Leave us alone."